DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 432 JC 780 052

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TITLE The Policy Recommendations of the Association of American Geographers as Reflected In the Ventura County Community College.
PUB DATE 7 Mar 77
NOTE 25p.; Ed.D. Practicum, Nova University

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Educational Assessment; Educational Policy; *Geography Instruction; *Junior Colleges; National Organizations; *Professional Associations; Questionnaires; School Surveys; *Standards
IDENTIFIERS Association of American Geographers

ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted to identify the degree to which the Association of American Geographers (AAG) 1970 recommendations on geography programs in two-year colleges were reflected in geography programs offered in the Ventura County Community College District (California). Results indicated that the recommendations were followed to a great extent, with the curriculum position of geography affirmed, a full range of courses offered, and the 10 instructors well qualified, each having a Master of Arts degree in geography. Most of the instructors had formal preparation for teaching, almost all used non-traditional methods, belonged to professional organizations, and informed their students of employment opportunities suitable for those with a background in geography. However, recommendations regarding the establishment of links between two- and four-year institutions and for obtaining external support for geography programs had not been followed. The 14 AAG recommendations and the questionnaire sent to geography instructors are included. (LH)

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ED148432

THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHERS AS REFLECTED IN THE VENTURA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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POLICY SYSTEMS

by

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Ventura College

JC 780 052

A PRACTICUM PRESENTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

NOVA UNIVERSITY

March 7, 1977

ABSTRACT

The Association of American Geographers (AAG) is a non-governmental organization which seeks to exert an influence on geographic education in the community college. In order to enhance the position of geography within the two-year school, the AAG issued a series of recommendations directed toward faculty and administrators. This project sought to identify the recommendations which were in operation in a community college district consisting of three individual schools. Through a survey of educators concerned with geography, it was discovered that all but two of the recommendations were being followed. The discovery prompted the suggestion that a district-wide meeting of geography instructors be held. Topics of discussion would focus on their relationship with neighboring four year institutions and information on organizations which have funds available for geographic education at the two year school.

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INTRODUCTION

Special interest groups not affiliated with the federal government seek to exert an influence on the internal operations of post-secondary educational institutions. One such group, interested in geographic education, is the Association of American Geographers (AAG). Through a series of publications directed toward the community college, the AAG set forth recommendations which were meant to establish and enhance geographic education within the two year school.

Nature of the Problem

The nature of this practicum consists of the AAG and its recommendations as reflected in geographic education throughout the Ventura County Community College District (VCCCD).

Purpose of the Investigation

The purpose of the investigation was to identify the degree to which AAG recommendations were reflected in the 1976-77 geography program within the district. Specific attention was directed toward (1) the curriculum position of geography, (2) types of geography courses taught, and (3) quality of the instructional staff.

Methodology

The investigation into the relationship between the AAG recommendations and geography in VCCCD was conducted through

the administration of a questionnaire to faculty who taught geography during the 1976-77 school year. The questionnaire was given to both part time and full time faculty.

The results of the survey were compared to the AAG recommendations of 1970. Responses which corresponded to the recommendations were considered to be strong points. Responses which did not correspond to the recommendations were identified as weak points. Weak points were considered an area of concern and were subsequently reviewed for possible corrective action.

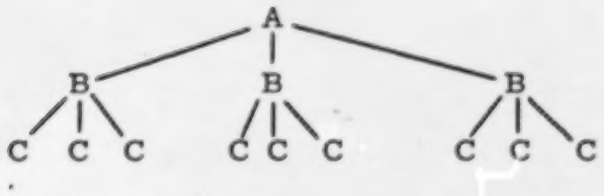
BACKGROUND

It is generally accepted that a community college does not exist as an autonomous unit. In fact, its operation responds to the influence exerted on it by special interest groups (3, pp. 159-61). As a result, the institution changes and evolves (4, p. 137; 12, pp. 19-37; 13, pp. 33-50). A number of investigators addressing themselves to policy systems which operate on the two year school have pointed out that special interest groups may exert a positive influence (5, pp. 10-11) while others may have a negative impact (6, pp. 301-15). Ultimately, it is the individual, whether teacher or administrator, who will accept or reject the attempts at influence (2, p. 309).

A model of how an external group exerts influence on the institution and its members was proposed by Banfield (2, pp. 307-23). The model calls for an individual to give power or control to an organization. This transfer of power can occur through an action such as

becoming a member in that group or simply by acknowledging its existence. Next, the organization makes a decision or initiates an action and informs those in its sphere of influence. At this point, the receiving individual may accept or reject the decision. If (s)he accepts, more power is transferred to the group. If the decision is rejected, the individual tends to be dropped, voluntarily or otherwise, from the group. If dropped, the person regains personal power but it is restricted in its usage because of its diminished magnitude. Accordingly, there is a tendency to go along with the group as to the decision. Ultimately, the decision or action diffuses down to individuals outside the immediate group.

Banfield saw his model in the form of a pyramid

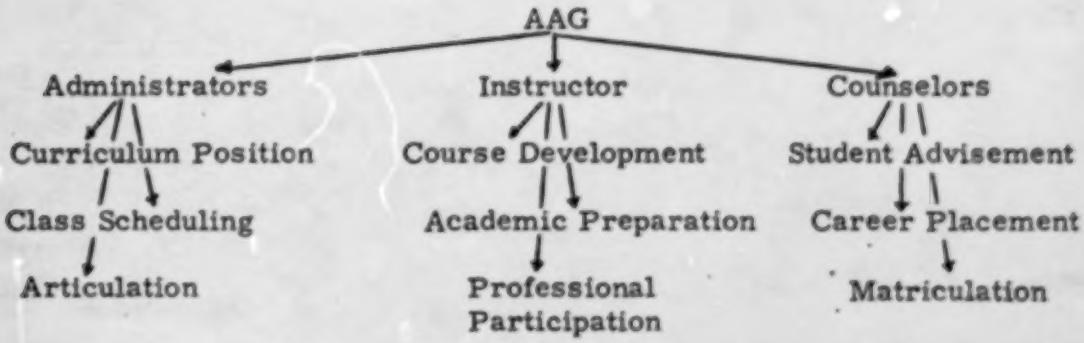


Where:

A : the organization
B: the member
C: ultimate receivers of the decision or action

When the model is applied to the AAG and the community college, we find that the geographic educators who are members have tacitly given power to the national organization. Its existence is acknowledged by officials at the federal, state, and community college level. Thus, the AAG is a viable entity in terms of exerting an influence on the operation of a community college. This can be visualized in the following

diagram.



In order to operationalize the AAG model in the district, it is necessary to closely examine the AAG and the VCCCD. Specific attention is directed towards how the AAG and the VCCCD responded to the dramatic increase in student enrollment during the late 1960's and early 1970's.

The Association of American Geographers

The AAG is the major national level organization for geographers. Its membership is over 6,500 and is composed primarily of geographic educators (1, p. 11). Occasionally, the AAG establishes guidelines and recommendations pertaining to geographic education. The position statements are usually derived through a consensus within a relatively small committee and are subsequently forwarded to all who are within its sphere of influence.

With the rapid expansion of higher education facilities and increased student enrollment of the 1960's, the AAG developed a Commission on College Geography. The commission was to produce a series of publications designed to spell out the meaning of geography,

its rightful place within the curriculum, who should teach the subject, and the proper tacher preparation.

The publications authored by the commission where addressed specifically to the administration and faculty of institutions of higher education. For example, within the preface of Geography in Undergraduate Liberal Education, it is stated that,

> "...The report is addressed not only to professional gographers but also to teachers in other disciplines and to academic advisors and administors." (7, p. v)

Publications such as that mentioned above and Geographic Manpower (5) aswell as Undergraduate Major Programs in American Geography (10) were made available to all members of the AAG and key individuals within the schools: administrators, counselors, and librarians.

As the number of community colleges increased during the 1960's, the AAG determined that it should seek to exert a greater influence on the policy systems of the two year institutions. This emphasis was prompted by an awareness that over 60% of all students enrolled in introductory geography courses were matriculated in community colleges (6, p. 23).

Once again the AAG assembled the Committee on College Geography. Its task was to develop position papers which were to influence the curriculum position, type of courses, and quality of instructors in community college geography classes. The committee's composition consisted of a numerical balance between community

college and university teachers. The publications, which appeared between 1967 and 1970 were:

> Introductory Geography: Viewpoints and Themes (8).
> New Approaches in Introductory College Geography Courses (9).
> Geography in the Two-Year College (6).

In order to avoid ambiquity over who was to be influenced by the papers, the audience was succintly identified:

> "This report is directed especially to those in responsible positions of administration, counseling, and instruction in the two-year schools..."(6, p. i).

The 1970 report clearly delineated fourteen "...specific recommendations for careful consideration by administrators and geography instructors in the two-year colleges..."(6, p. 63). These recommendations (Appendix A) resulted from a nation-wide survey conducted by the commission and dealt with course offerings and instructor qualifications.

Ventura County Community College District

With the historical development of the recommendations in mind, it is necessary to consider the VCCCD. The district presently consists of three community colleges which are named according to their location. Ventura College, occupying its present location in 1955, is the oldest and largest of the three. Moorpark College is second in terms of age (established, 1976) and student population while Oxnard is the most recent school (opened, 1975) with the smallest student body.

Each of the schools developed in their respective urban area as the population increased in that portion of the county. All of the colleges have made a committment to fulfilling the educational needs of those within their service areas. In addition, the administration of the schools are aware of their educational position within the state and nation as well as groups which seek to influence its operation. Geography is an integral aspect of the curriculum at the three schools. It is against this background that the practicum was conducted.

Significance

The significance of this investigation focussed on an improvement of geographic education in the district vis-à-vis the recommendations of the AAG. Because the organization has set forth recommendations developed from a national perspective, it follows that there is a strong relationship between its recommendations and the community college's role in higher education in the country (14). Accordingly, it was proper to critically examine the geography program within VCCCD in order to identify points of departure from its national role and move toward bringing the program within the scope of national geographic education.

Assumptions

As in most investigations, certain assumptions were made. The first was that organizations frequently develop recommendations with elements which may be rejected by the recipients because of a difficulty in their initiation at the local level. It was felt that the AAG was no

exception. The second assumption was that a lack of recommendation fulfillment resulted from influencial factors with a higher priority. In the VCCCD, these factors included community needs, college-wide policy systems, the role of neighboring colleges and universities, and state-federal functions.

Given the validity of the preceding assumptions, it was felt that once AAG recommendations which were followed in the VCCCD had been identified, it would be possible to determine the feasibility of implementing the remainder. This was deemed to be a worthy goal given the AAG's stated position on geographic education at the community college.

In order to establish which of the AAG recommendations were followed and which had not been followed, it was necessary to conduct a survey of geography teachers in the district.

PROCEDURES

The procedures used in the investigation consisted of identifying those who taught geography in the district, administration of a questionnaire, and a comparative analysis between the survey results and the recommendations.

The Instructors

A review of class schedules for the three campuses resulted in a list of those who taught geography as of 1976-77. It was discovered that there was a total of thirteen: four at Ventura College, five at Moorpark College and four at Oxnard College.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire used nation-wide by the AAG in 1970 was modified to correspond to the recommendations (Appendix B). The instructors were ask to list the classes they taught so that any last minute schedule changes would be included in the survey. The questionnaire was mailed, along with an introductory letter, to both part time and full time faculty at the three community colleges within the district. A self-addressed envelope was included.

Data Summary

Individual questionnaires were reviewed for completeness. Responses to each question were tabulated according to individual colleges. A summary for the district was derived from the school totals.

Comparative Analysis

The summary results were viewed in terms of corresponding recommendations as published by the AAG in 1970. Those questions which received less than 50% positive responses were considered to be weak points. Those which garnered more than 50% were identified as strong points.

Evaluation

Judgemental statements were formulated as to the feasibility of implementing the recommendations which were identified as weak

points. These statements were made in light of informal and formal policy systems operating within the district.

Procedural Modification

A change in procedure from that in the practicum proposal was necessary because of a lack of data on the 1970 period. Data deficiency resulted from a wide-spread change in personnel at Ventura College and Moorpark College and the establishment of Oxnard College which occurred after 1970. As a result, the focus of the investigation shifted to the recommendations in comparison to the 1976-77 period.

Another change was the expansion of the investigation to that of all three district colleges. It was felt that a census of geography instructors would give more complete data than a sample.

RESULTS

The return rate of the questionnaires was 77% (10 out of 13). It was felt that the high return rate represented an appropriate sample population. A summary of the survey results are given in Table 1. The following discussion centers on the salient points within the table.

All of those who responded had a Master of Arts degree in geography with 70% (7 out of 10) having had some form of teacher preparation. The survey revealed that 90% (9 out of 10) of the staff had incorporated various forms of non-traditional teaching strategies or techniques. A use of media was reported by 90% with 50% (5 out of 10) incorporating class discussion as a teaching technique. In

Table 1. Ventura County Community College District-Wide Questionnaire Summary

	Ventura	Moorpark	Oxnard	District (Total)
# of instructors who responded to questionnaire	4	5	1	10
Full time Employee	2	1	-0-	3
Part Time Employee	2	4	1	7
BA Major in Geography	3	4	-0-	7
Minor in Geography	-0-	1	-0-	1
MA Major in Geography	4	5	1	10
Minor in Geography	-0-	-0-	-0-	
# of Faculty with Formal Teaching Preparation	3	4	-0-	7
# of Faculty who use non-traditional strategies or techniques	4	5	-0-	9
# of Faculty who have sought grants outside the college	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
# of Faculty with membership in professional organizations	4	5	-0-	9
# of Faculty who feel the college encourages participation in prof. organizations	3	2	-0-	5
# of Faculty who inform students of employment opportunities	3	5	-0-	8
# of Faculty who have been contacted by four year schools about strengthening programs	-0-	1	-0-	1

addition, 20% (2 out of 10) reported using various forms of instructional activities tailored to the individual student.

The survey revealed that 90% (9 out of 10) of the teachers belonged to at least one of the professional organizations delineated on the questionnaire. One individual belonged to four of those listed. In terms of organizational membership, only 30% (3 out of 10) did not belong to the AAG. In addition, only 40% (4 out of 10) felt that their college encouraged participation in professional organizations. None of the respondents had applied for grants outside of their college.

The questionnaire also indicated that only 10% (1 out of 10) had been contacted by a four year institute about strengthening their program. Many of the faculty, 80% (8 out of 10), inform their students of employment opportunities suitable for those with a background in geography.

Courses being offered by the schools covered the spectrum of introductory geography:

Physical Geography
Cultural Geography
Travel Geography
Urban Geography
World Affairs
Geography of California
Weather and Climate

A comparison of the survey results with the recommendations indicated that only two recommendations had received less than a majority of total responses. Specifically, these recommendations dealt with communication with four year schools and seeking funds outside of the college. Table 2 summarizes the comparative results.

Table 2. District Strong Points and Weak Points

Recommendation Number	Strong	Weak
1	x	
2	x	
3	x	
4	x	
5		x
6	x	
7	x	
8	x	
9	x	
10	x	
11	x	
12		x
13	x	
14	x	

DISCUSSION

Overall, it was found that the AAG recommendations were followed to a remarkable degree within the district. Particular strong points were recommendations 6, 7, 10, 11, and 13. For example, the teachers were well qualified in academic preparation--all had a Master of Art degree in geography. Likewise, most of the teachers had some form of teacher preparation prior to assuming their instructional role. In addition, most of the group were involved in professional organizations and kept their students informed about employment opportunities.

In terms of recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 14, the survey indicated that geography was a viable aspect of the general education program at all the schools. The administration of the colleges looked favorably on geography--even to the point of its inclusion in outreach

programs. They were also responsive to new course offerings as determined by community needs. In addition, the administration encouraged the development of new curriculum materials.

Recommendations which were not followed dealt specifically with numbers 5 and 12. Recommendation 5 pertained to four year school's contact with the two year institutions. It was discovered that only one out of ten instructors had been contacted by four year schools about their program. This condition is not unique to the VCCCD. Others have discovered the problem and are presently engaged in establishing lines of communication between all postsecondary schools in California. For example, the California Council for Geographic Education has been conducting meetings in various areas of the state. The organization invites all geography teachers to attend and exchange ideas on strengthening their programs.

A second recommendation which contained an element of non-compliance was number 12--specifically the reference to obtaining funds from outside the college. The survey indicated that none of the staff had sought external financial support for programs. One reason for this problem may be related to strong institutional interest in geography; hence, there are adequate funds available for instructional related activities. Another reason may be that the instructors believe that their primary responsibility is that of teaching introductory courses rather than research and working with advanced geography majors. Accordingly, the instructors may feel there is little need for specialized

equipment or programs which give the student career-specific training.

A third possibility is simply that the instructors are unaware of how to obtain external funds. As a result, a program which an instructor wishes to initiate may never materialize because of a lack of knowledge about fundable programs and/or who to contact for the information.

Implications

The implications of this study are that the geographers in VCCCD ascribe to the recommendations of the AAG to a high degree. The curriculum position of geography is affirmed, a full range of courses are offered, and the instructor staff is well qualified. As a result, the geography teachers are providing their students with a sound geographic education. Likewise, the instructors are keeping abreast of developments within geography as well as education in general. In addition, faculty members are showing the students that a background in geography can lead to career areas.

Recommendations

In order for the geography program to be more completely aligned with the AAG recommendations, the following suggestions are put forth:

1. A greater effort is to be made toward an exchange of ideas and information between the geography teachers of VCCCD and those at neighboring four year institutions.

2. The faculty of the VCCCD is to be informed about foundations and granting organizations which have indicated an interest in funding geographic education at the two year institutions.

Implementation

These recommendations will be implemented through a precedent-setting district-wide meeting of geography faculty. Agendized items will deal specifically with AAG recommendations 5 and 12 and center around suggestions 1 and 2 above.

It is felt that the district meeting will produce a positive change in the geography faculty. This will be accomplished by informing them of their role in higher education as defined by the AAG and offering a platform for personal interaction about areas of common concern. Ideally, this national perspective and sense of comarade will be conveyed to their students which will result in a more eclectic learning environment.

APPENDIX A

Recommendations of the Association of American Geographers

1. Every effort should be made to include geography in those two-year colleges having a general education program.

2. The choice of courses should be based on instructional resources and institutional and articulation needs rather than on any strict adherence to the specific courses described in this report. No one course discussed in this report is considered more appropriate than another for the two-year college.

3. High priority should be given to the development of new curriculum materials reflecting current trends in geography keeping in mind the variety of needs that exist in two-year colleges. Both the individual geography instructor and the geographic profession should share the initiative in undertaking such curriculum development.

4. Departments of geography in four-year colleges should recognize the first and second courses in geography at two-year schools as a part of the general or liberal education of the student and should not be unduly concerned about how closely such courses parallel the introductory level courses at their institutions. Moreover, for the student who transfers from a two-year college as a prospective major in geography, courses taken in geography at the two-year college should be accepted at least as elective credit in the major field for degree purposes.

5. Geographers in four-year colleges and universities are urged to contact two-year college geography instructors in their vicinity and seek ways to assist them in strengthening geography's position in these colleges.

6. The minimum academic preparation for two-year college geography instructors should be equivalent in level to a master's degree in the discipline. A strong academic graduate minor in a cognate field is desirable.

7. Appropriate academic preparation should include guided teaching experience.

8. As there is a serious regional imbalance in the supply of and demand for qualified geography instructors, college administrators are urged to seek such instructors from other parts of the United States when none are available locally to fill positions.

9. College Administrators are encouraged to contact the Executive Director of the Association of American Geographers for assistance. He is in a position to help in advertising job openings in two-year colleges and in recommending local geographers with whom college officials might consult.

10. Geography departments should alert their students to the employment opportunities available in the two-year colleges. Each graduate department should accept the responsibility for the preparation of two-year as well as four-year college instructors.

11. There is an important need for a program of in-service training, particularly for those now teaching geography with limited backgrounds in the discipline.

12. An effective program of sabbatical leaves should be developed by two-year colleges, with the released time utilized by the geography instructors in attaining additional educational and professional goals. Foundations and other granting agencies should continue their efforts to provide instructors with financial support.

13. The two-year college geography instructor is urged to participate in the affairs of professional geography organizations at local, state, and national levels. Colleges should cooperate by encouraging such participation and by providing released time and financial support.

14. Professional organizations should accommodate the special problems and interests of two-year college instructors in order to enable them to meet their obligations both to their students and to their profession.

QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME_____ COLLEGE_____

Are you a full time employee at this college? Yes_____ No_____

What portion of your instructional load this term is in Geography?_____

To what four-year institution or institutions do most of the prospective transfer students enrolled in your courses actually transfer:

1._____ 2._____ 3._____ 4._____

DEGREES RECEIVED

A. B. or B. S. awarded (Date)_____ (College)_____

(Major)_____ (Minor(s)_____

Master's awarded (Date)_____ (College)_____

(Major)_____ (Minor(s)_____

Are you using any teaching strategies or techniques other than the lecture method?

YES_____ NO_____ If yes, please describe.

Have geographers from four-year institutions contacted you in regard to strengthening your geography program? YES_____ NO_____

Prior to assuming your teaching activities, did you have any formal teacher preparation such as guided teaching experience?

YES_____ NO _____

Do you make your student aware of employment opportunities in which a background in geography may be helpful?

YES_____NO_____

Have you sought grants or other funds, outside of the College, for geography programs or projects? YES_____NO_____

Have you been a member of any of the following organizations?	YES	NO
1. Association of American Geographers	____	____
2. National Council for Geographic Education	____	____
3. Association of Pacific Coast Geographers	____	____
4. California Council for Geographic Education	____	____
5. Los Angeles Geographical Society	____	____

Does your college encourage participation in programs, meetings, etc. sponsored by the organizations listed in the question above?

YES_____NO_____

On the back of this sheet, please list the courses you have taught during the Fall 1976 and Spring 1977 semesters.

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